

# THE GOSPLE OF NEW LIFE

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Project Assignment  
Enter and Re-tell a Story of Culture

## Enter and Re-tell a Story of Culture

**Purpose:** The purpose of this assignment is to help the learner become missional in his/her view and assessment of the culture he/she lives in.

**Objective:** To use the *ought, is, can, will* framework to enter and re-tell a cultural in light of the gospel. It is recommended that you choose either your home culture or the culture in which you live.

**Instructions:** Consider one aspect of your culture revealed in art, literature, custom or history and demonstrate how the gospel best illuminates and explains the message. Use the questions below to spur your thinking. Consider having a conversation with a non-believer about the aspect of culture that you looked at.

1. Choose an aspect of culture to assess:

- Literature, Art, Music or Pop Culture
- Tradition or Custom
- Belief or Conviction
- National Story
- Holiday
- Cultural Taboo

2. Consider the following questions:

- What is the message that is being communicated through this piece of culture? What hopes and dreams are expressed? What are the disappointments? Who are the heroes? What values are honored?
- Look at the message in light of Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration (What *ought* to be, what *is*, what *can be* and what *will be*). What parts of the message can be accepted, what needs to be rejected and what can be adapted.
- How does the gospel best explain the message communicated through this cultural expression?
- How might you spring from this assessment into significant conversation?

### Example 1: *China's Lei Feng*

One of China's national stories is that of a young communist soldier Lei Feng who was said to be completely self-sacrificing. A loving son and devoted comrade Lei Feng has been memorialized as the poster child for the perfect communist citizen. Whether any of the stories are true or not every Chinese child learns of the self-sacrifice of Lie Feng.

The message that is communicated through this story is two fold, one explicit and one implicit. Explicitly the story is about good citizenship. But there is another aspect of the story that is less obvious; the story was created to control its hearers. The most important thing about the story isn't the story itself but how it is used and how the average person views it.

What do the four chapters of the gospel say about this story, both the story itself and how and why it is told?

**Ought:** What should sacrifice look like, specifically its motivation? How do you see sacrifice and motivation playing out before the advent of sin?

**Is:** Is the hearer more or less motivated to serve his/her fellow citizens? How are both sacrifice and motivation distorted in this scenario? Are there times when sacrifice is wrong or unsavory? What is the difference between motivation and manipulation? What does sacrifice look like when it is not given freely?

**Can:** How does the gospel protect people from manipulation? How does it provide motivation for self-sacrifice? What is the goal of sacrifice from a biblical point of view? How Jesus' sacrifice shapes our view of giving of ourselves?

### **Example 2: *The West's Search for a Savior***

#### ***Make a Lover Out of You Yet***

Red Letter Days, The Wallflowers

Slow down you're breaking up  
Use your words don't yell so much  
I don't understand a word that you're saying

Move in and come up close  
You look like you've maybe seen a ghost  
Tell me has some one gotten to you baby  
Open your arms and pick up your head  
Open your eyes so you can see what happens next

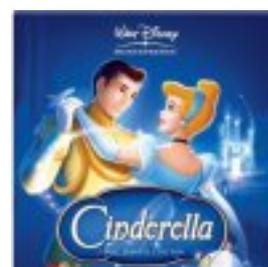
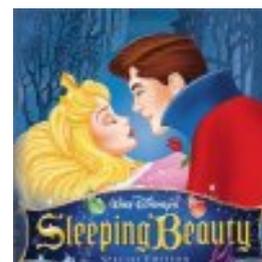
You won't believe just how good it can get;  
We'll make a lover out of you yet

The fog is so thick I can't see my hands  
It got much worse as soon as I got in  
I know you're somewhere here in the water  
Its ten feet deep and the river won't stop  
Ill tell you what's in it when I make it across  
You can make too if you let someone help you  
But you got to get in and you got to let go  
Then you can begin to come up slow like a dessert rose

You wont believe just how good it can it get;  
We'll make a lover out of you yet

Take a deep breath and hold it in tight  
Push your face up right into the light  
Can't you feel that full moon shining down on you?  
Help has come from the great unknown  
Just maybe not when you needed it most  
I can see that you already know that you're leaving  
I wish you'd stay and just let me in  
Because everything can change but you got to be ready  
Because you won't know when

You won't believe just how good it can get;  
We'll make a lover out of you yet



I was listening to my i-pod when I realized that there is a strong contradiction between the hopes expressed through art and literature and the actual advice we give to our friends. There is a romantic thread that runs through much of our culture that reveals our desire for redeeming love; a love that can change us.

The song I was listening to, *Make a Lover Out of You Yet*, by the Wallflowers is about a woman who has lost her ability to trust and so also her ability to love. The singer is telling her that he is going to love her in such a way that she will be able to love again. His love is going to change her, heal her.

This theme of redeeming love is a strong current that runs through much of my home culture. Cinderella was saved from her desperate situation by the love of the prince, Sleeping Beauty and Snow White were awakened and released from a dark spell by a kiss of love, and The Beauty loved the Beast back into humanity. Hollywood expresses the same theme in movies like *Pretty Woman*, where a woman is loved out of prostitution by one of her customers. In Victor Hugo's *Les Miserable*, Jean Valjean is changed by the loving kindness of a priest while Javert remains locked in his own self-righteousness untouched by the kindness of Jean Valjean.

Redeeming love is what we long for but it's not how we advise our friends. I don't know how many times I have given the relational advice, "stop rescuing him! Let her feel the weight of her own irresponsibility, or of his drinking or of her poor spending habits. You want a partner not another child so don't rescue her." We give the same advice to parents who constantly rescue their children because we know that when people are rescued they don't grow up.

As I consider the differences between art and life I can start to understand the contradictions. First I noticed that in art the people who need rescuing are really great people who are in bad situations. There are never really serious character flaws that might be causing the bad circumstances. In life the people who need rescuing need to be rescued as much from themselves as from their circumstances. Secondly in art the rescuer is always up to the task even when rescuing cost him/her a great deal. In much of art the cost of the rescue is either played down, completely non-existent or sometimes melodramatic. In real life we aren't as capable of loving someone into a new person. Their problems are too big and we are too small to have the affect we want.

I think the whole human race is in denial; we don't want to admit how deep our character flaws are or our inability to rescue and be rescued beyond a certain extent. There is a story in ancient literature that does take these into consideration. It is about a father and son who lived in perfect harmony...

***Now it's your turn:***

What do the four chapters of the gospel say about this story?

***Ought:***

***Is:***

***Can:***

***Will:***